DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 379 388 UD 030 316

AUTHOR Eichenstein, Rosalind; And Others
TITLE Project Achieve Part I: Qualitative Findings 1993-94.
INSTITUTION New York City Board of Education, Brooklyn, NY. Office of Educational Research.
PUB DATE 1 Aug 94
NOTE 45p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Attendance; Educational Administration; Educational Change; *Grouping (Instructional Purposes); High Risk Students; High Schools; *High School Students; *House Plan; *School Restructuring; School Size; Staff Development; Student Attitudes; Teacher Attitudes; *Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS *New York City Board of Education; *Project Achieve NY

ABSTRACT

Project Achieve was designed to improve the attendance and academic performance of at-risk students. In 1993-94, the program was in the first year of its second 3-year cycle, and operated in 34 New York City public high schools. The program has focused on restructuring the standard grouping of grades into "houses," small units that offer intensive education and integrated support services, and in developing a schoolwide management and planning capability. This report assesses the schoolwide teams and services to students in a sample of 10 schools. Houses, which averaged 250 students in 1993-94, were usually heterogeneous in student composition. Most house coordinators observed improved attendance and student responsiveness in school, and half saw an improvement in grades. All schools expanded and strengthened house-based support services for students. Most students interviewed expressed satisfaction with the house concept. Recommendations for improvement center on further reducing house size, increased staff development activities, and better student services. Two tables present program data, and an appendix lists participating schools. (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 379 388

OER Report

PROJECT ACHIEVE
PART I: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

1993-94

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

X Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Robert Tobias
NYC Public Schools
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

UD030316

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PROJECT ACHIEVE
PART I: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

1993-94

BOARD OF EDUCATION
OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Carol A. Gresser
President

Irene H. Impellizzeri
Vice President

Louis DeSario
Sandra E. Lerner
Luis O. Reyes
Ninfa Segarra-Vélez
William C. Thompson, Jr.
Members

Tiffany Raspberry
Student Advisory Member

Ramon C. Cortines
Chancellor

8/1/94

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

It is the policy of the Board of Education of the City School District of the City of New York not to discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, age, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or sex in its educational programs, activities, and employment policies, and to maintain an environment free of sexual harassment, as required by law. Inquiries regarding compliance with appropriate laws may be directed to Frederick A. Hill, Jr., Director (Acting), Office of Equal Opportunity, 110 Livingston Street, Room 601, Brooklyn, New York 11201, Telephone: (718) 935-3320

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Achieve was designed to improve the attendance and academic performance of at-risk students. In 1993-94, the program was in the first year of its second three-year cycle, and operated in 34 New York City public high schools.

The program has focused on two key areas: restructuring of the standard grouping of grades into houses (that is, small units within schools that offer students innovative educational strategies and integrated support services), and developing a schoolwide planning and management capability in participating schools. The 1993-94 project guide-lines focused on ways that schools could consolidate gains in these areas, by requiring houses to set up a core team of teachers in each house, to extend successful initiatives such as alternative instructional options, and to expand house-based support services.

This report, Part I of a two-part study by the Office of Educational Research (O.E.R.), assesses schoolwide teams and services to students in a sample of 10 schools. Part II, under separate cover, summarizes schools' attendance and dropout rates, and measures students' academic performance against the Chancellor's performance standards.

Program guidelines recommended that houses include between 300-500 students. All Project Achieve schools had houses, although the number of students per house ranged from less than 100 to more than 800. However, the average size of a house had dropped from 300 students per house in 1992-93 to 250 students per house in 1993-94--a reduction of 17 percent.

Fifty percent of the Achieve coordinators indicated that most of the houses in the school had a heterogeneous student population, one said that 75 percent of the houses were heterogeneous, and four percent that there were about equal numbers of heterogeneous and homogenous houses. One coordinator noted that grouping students into houses made programming difficult.

While one-half of the coordinators indicated that all or nearly all of the teachers in the school were house-affiliated, the others indicated considerably smaller percentages. Almost all of the coordinators indicated that core instructional teams had been set up. All of the coordinators reported the use of innovative instructional techniques and alternative instructional options. House coordinators reported that innovative courses had good results. Eighty percent of house coordinators saw improved attendance and student responsiveness in class, 70 percent reported an increase in credits earned, and 50 percent, an improvement in grades.

Although 80 percent of the coordinators said that assistant principals (A.P.s) were affiliated with all of the houses in the school, a substantial percentage of these coordinators also indicated that some A.P.s resisted assuming additional responsibilities in a house.

All schools expanded and strengthened house-based support services for students. Schools used case conferences to assess individual students' academic and behavioral problems, and to plan interventions. Schools continued to integrate community-based organization (C.B.O.) support staff into houses, and into the schoolwide planning and management process.

In all schools, attendance monitoring and outreach responsibilities have moved from the school's attendance office to the Project Achieve houses. In some schools, however, house and central attendance staff had overlapping responsibility for monitoring absentees.

Eighty percent of the Achieve coordinators reported that each of the houses had their own office, and 20 percent said that they had to share office space. All of the schools gave staff some type of common time--most usually, a common preparation period.

All house coordinators held periodic house management meetings to discuss issues that affected the house as a whole. They reported the results of these meetings to schoolwide planning teams and at monthly cabinet meetings. Most coordinators were satisfied that the ways in which they communicated house management and instructional issues to departments met students' needs.

In all sample schools, schoolwide planning and implementation teams regularly and successfully addressed schoolwide issues. In some schools, schoolwide planning was carried out by the Project Achieve team. In other schools, the Project Achieve team was integrated into another schoolwide decision-making group such as a school-based managment/shared decision-making (SBM/SDM) team.

Most students interviewed by O.E.R. expressed considerable satisfaction with the house that they were in and with the house concept in general. They expressed appreciation for the help of house staff members and the use of the house office, found that being in a house was fun and helped them focus their efforts, and felt that they were more valued for being themselves. However, many students wished that there were more security guards at the school, that other students would stop "playing around," and that they had more books and more after-school activities, and a few mentioned the desire for more teachers who were 'caring."

The ten house coordinators were also generally very enthusiastic about the house concept, citing the fact that they liked getting to know the students better, the "family feeling," the sense of accomplishment, and the increase in group pride. Some complained about the large size of the house, the limitations on the time they had available to do the job, and the lack of adequate training.

Based on the findings of this evaluation, O.E.R. recommends that program managers:

- mandate that schools implement Project Achieve's guidelines with respect to house size and student-staff ratios in houses, and link the level of funding provided to their success in implementing these program aspects, understanding that this recommendation may be difficult to implement given the severity of the budget cuts that schools have had to absorb;
- help schools develop student selection criteria for houses that does not result in homogenous groupings;
- help program coordinators improve the ways in which A.P.s and teachers make the transition to house affiliation;
- provide in-depth, expert staff development in the use of alternative teaching tools such as portfolios;
- explore ways schools could earmark teachers' common time for developing innovative instruction and curriculum;
- explore ways in which attendance office staff and house attendance staff can interface smoothly to track absentees, and
- attempt to provide more adequate space for the Achieve office in participating schools.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was prepared by the Board of Education of the City of New York's Office of Educational Research (O.E.R.) under the supervision of Dr. Lori Mei. Dr. Rosalind Eichenstein coordinated the evaluation, and wrote the first draft of the report. Basima Ahed, Nestor Hincapie, Heriberto Watson, Lois Wilcken, Jerry Woods, and Eleanor Zak made field visits, interviewed school staff, and observed programs. Carol Meyer analyzed data and edited the report.

Additional copies of this report are available by writing to:

Dr. Lori Mei
Office Of Educational Research
110 Livingston Street, Room 740
Brooklyn, New York 11201

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY		i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS		iv
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
	Background	1
	Focus of This Year's Program	1
	Evaluation Methodology	2
	Scope and Organization of this Report	3
II.	PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION	4
	House Structure and Functioning	4
	Instruction	8
	Staffing--Other Than Teachers	14
	Support Services	16
	Community-Based Organizations	16
	Attendance Monitoring	18
	House Offices	19
	Common Time	20
	Management	21
	Program Support	23
	Student Perceptions	24
	House Coordinators' Perceptions	27
III.	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	30
APPENDIX:	Project Achieve Participating High Schools 1993-94	34

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Range of House Sizes Project Achieve 1993-94 School Sample	5
2	Number of House-Based Students and Staff in Project Achieve Sample Houses	15

In addition, they interviewed the coordinator of one of the Project Achieve houses in each sample school about staffing, student selection, core instructional teams and innovative instructional efforts, support services, changes since last year, case conferencing, and their general opinions about being house-affiliated. And lastly, they interviewed about 10 students in houses at each school about how they were assigned to that house, what they liked and didn't like about it, house activities, who they talked to when they had personal or academic problems, attendance procedures, and how the school could be made better.

Evaluators also obtained quantitative data on students' attendance and academic performance from all participating schools, and from central data files, and will present an analysis of students' performance in a separate report.

SCOPE AND ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT

This report describes the 1993-94 Project Achieve program in a sample of participating schools. Chapter I provides information on the program's background, the focus of this year's program, and the methods used by O.E.R. to evaluate the program; Chapter II describes services to students, and the current functioning and accomplishments of schoolwide planning and management committees, and Chapter III presents O.E.R.'s conclusions and recommendations. An appendix contains a list of Project Achieve schools.

instruction for the students in their house through the development of interdisciplinary classes and collaborative instruction. Schools were also asked to extend successful initiatives, such as alternative instructional options,* and to expand house-based support services, with the assistance of C.B.O. staff.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The Office of Educational Research (O.E.R.) has evaluated Project Achieve since its inception. For this year's study, O.E.R. selected a sample of ten Project Achieve schools, based on their location, their participation in other initiatives, and so that each of the 34 schools will be evaluated at least once in each three-year cycle. Two schools in the Bronx, two in Manhattan, and one in Queens were also included in last year's study. One school (William E. Grady in the Basis superintendency) was a vocational-technical school, and one (Bronx Regional) was an alternative high school; the other eight were academic-comprehensive high schools.

In each school, evaluators interviewed the Project Achieve coordinator about house size, organization, and staffing; the Project Achieve team; house management and case conferencing; attendance procedures; innovative instruction and alternative instructional options; and staff common time and office space.

---

*Alternative instructional options are additional ways students can earn credits toward graduation. Options include classes before and after regular school hours, independent study, work-study, and internships.

I. INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Project Achieve is a school improvement program for at-risk students which is operating in 34 high schools that have been selected for participation on the basis of risk factors and performance outcomes.* The program seeks to improve student attendance, reduce the dropout rate, increase students' credit accumulation, and improve Regents Competency Test (R.C.T.) reading, writing, and mathematics results. In this program, grades are restructured into small, cohesive units called "houses," and students are provided with support and family outreach services as well as innovative instructional approaches. Each school has contracted with at least one community-based organization (C.B.O.) to provide additional services to the student, and each school has a Project Achieve decision-making and management committee which is integrated with ongoing schoolwide improvement efforts. Support was provided by the Division of High School's (D.H.S.s) Office of Performance Outcomes, along with a liaison person from each superintendency. The program is funded by the New York State Education Department and was in the first year of its second three-year cycle in 1993-94.

FOCUS OF THIS YEAR'S PROGRAM

Guidelines for this year's program required each house to include a core team of teachers who would promote innovative

---

*A list of Project Achieve schools is provided in the appendix to this report.

II. PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

HOUSE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONING

Number of Houses

The key to Project Achieve is the grouping of students into small, cohesive units called houses, with a number of staff members assigned to each house. As indicated in Table 1, the number of houses in the ten schools in O.E.R.'s sample varied considerably, from only four at Andrew Jackson High School to 13 at Taft. The coordinator at Erasmus Hall indicated that the nine houses were arranged into four "sub-schools," including business, humanities, international, and science, but that each would be a separate house next year. Bronx Regional, an alternative school with about 500 students, breaks the students into five "family groups," and then further divides them into "teams" of 15-20 students each.

Size of Houses

Project Achieve's guidelines for 1993-94 mandated that house size should not exceed 500-600 students. All of the houses in this year's sample met that criteria, with the exception of Martin Luther King, Jr. High School, which had one house with nearly 900 students. The latter figure is particularly interesting in light of the fact that King was included in O.E.R.'s sample last year, and did not have any houses exceeding 700 students at that time. However, it also did not have any houses with less than 100 students last year--which is 30 more than the smallest house reported this year. Dewitt Clinton,

Table 1

Range of House Sizes
Project Achieve 1993-94 School Sample

School	Number of Houses	Size of Smallest House	Size Largest House
BASIS			
Fort Hamilton	8	155	500
William E. Grady	4	224	550
BROOKLYN			
Erasmus Hall	9	100	500
Prospect Hts.	7	100	300
BRONX			
DeWitt Clinton	9	200	450
Taft	13	115	400
MANHATTAN			
Brandeis	10	70	500
M.L. King, Jr.	8	70	880
QUEENS			
Andrew Jackson	4	350	450
ALTERNATIVE			
Bronx Regional*	5	100	100

*Bronx Regional, an alternative school of 500 students, organizes the students into five "family groups", and then into "teams" of of 15-20 students.

- Many schools had a wide range in number of students per house, from houses of 100 or fewer students to houses of more than 500 students.

Taft, and Brandeis were also in last year's sample, and had similar variations in the range of students per house, while the groupings at Jackson were about the same as they had been in the 1992-93 school year.

On average, the groupings for the ten houses as a whole were a bit smaller than the previous year, dropping from about 300 to roughly 250 students per house--a decline of 17 percent. This drop may be simply a function of the schools that were included in this particular sample, however.

Criteria Used for Assigning Students to Houses

Coordinators indicated that students were assigned to houses in a variety of ways. Nine of the ten coordinators said that students chose their house on the basis of the house's theme. At Grady, for example, which is a vocational-technical school, students elected particular career tracks.

However, a number of schools also used other criteria in assigning students to a house. Forty percent took risk factors into account (at Brandeis, for example, one of the houses was for students who had been truant and were working on a (General Education Diploma), 30 percent assigned students by grade cohort, and 20 percent used test scores in assigning students to particular houses. Interestingly, of the approximately 80 students interviewed by O.E.R., about half said that they had chosen their house, while the other half said that they had been assigned to it.

Heterogeneous or Homogeneous?

Program guidelines also asked participating schools to make the makeup of the houses as heterogeneous as possible, in order to avoid creating "deficit-based" houses which contain only students grouped by risk factors such as poor attendance and/or poor achievement. Experience has shown that grouping students on this basis can result in low morale among the students assigned to that house, and a high turnover rate in teaching staff associated with that house.

Five of the ten coordinators in O.E.R.'s sample indicated that most of the houses in the school had a heterogeneous population, one said that about 75 percent of the houses were heterogenous, and the other four said there were about equal numbers of homogeneous and heterogenous houses. The coordinator at the school where 75 percent of the houses were heterogenous said that the "old timers" didn't like these houses, and also noted that grouping students into houses made programming difficult from the grade advisors' standpoint. The coordinator at one of the schools where all of the houses were heterogenous said that both students and faculty had had trouble with "changes of this magnitude" and that they still tended to think of their students as "those freshmen and those sophomores."

Teacher Affiliations

When asked what percentage of teachers were house-affiliated, one-half of the coordinators indicated "all" or "nearly all," three of the ten said that about 50 percent of the

teachers were house-affiliated, one (Brandeis) reported that only 20 percent of the teachers were house-affiliated, and one (Fort Hamilton) said that teachers were only affiliated with the two multicultural houses, but that all teachers would be assigned to a house next year.

The methods for establishing these affiliations varied. In most cases, the teachers were given a first and second choice; in other instances, assignments were determined largely by the subject they were teaching. The coordinator at Brandeis noted that there was a "tug of war" between the house coordinator, the principal, and departmental chairpersons in "trying to find the right person for the right job."

Only a few coordinators reported teacher resistance to affiliating with a house for more than one year. One coordinator said that one teacher had objected to working with the General Education Diploma (G.E.D.) house because of "burnout"; one said that most teachers like working with older students and resist working with freshmen; and the coordinator of one school in which all of the houses were heterogenous noted that "sometimes the marriage between a supervisor/A.P. and a teacher may not work out and the teacher might want to get out of that situation."

INSTRUCTION

Core Instruction

Project Achieve planners asked schools to extend house-based instruction by providing a core of teachers in each house for ninth and tenth grade students, and by trying to provide an

instructional core for eleventh and twelfth graders as well. A core was defined as two or more teachers working together with a cohort of students. Planners also asked that the resulting instructional teams be given a common period so that members of the team could meet at least once a week to plan curriculum, develop shared instructional activities, and integrate instruction across their disciplines.

Almost all of the Achieve coordinators indicated that core instructional teams had been set up, but, confusingly, in some cases, the percentage of core teams reported far exceeded the percentage of teachers who were reported to be house-affiliated.

The primary obstacle to implementing core instruction reported by coordinators was that of programming or "logistics." For example, the coordinator at Grady noted that many of the classes at that school must be programmed around a shop, and that "if a kid has to be in shop, he or she may not be able to attend something else."

Innovative Instruction

Despite difficulties in organizing these classes, all of the coordinators in the sample reported the use of innovative instruction in the school, with 80 percent of them reporting the use of interdisciplinary or collaborative instruction, 70 percent mentioning innovative approaches such as portfolios and an equal percentage mentioning blocked classes, and 50 percent reporting other efforts such as cooperative learning and the use of the Copernican model.

Examples of interdisciplinary and/or collaborative teaching included sharing between English and social studies classes during black history month, integrating a shop class on the construction of American colonial houses with an academic class in American history, and studying the same subjects, such as India, in both global studies and communication arts classes. Innovative methods of instruction included the extensive use of portfolios in biology, social studies, and communication arts at Erasmus, the use of portfolios as part of a writing project in English classes at Martin Luther King, Jr. High School, and the use of portfolios in mathematics at Bronx Regional. At Jackson, some students had after-school jobs, while some advanced students were taking credits for college.

The students themselves also reported a number of innovative activities, including trips. For example, students in Taft's Business Institute house reported a trip to IBM, as well as IBM's mentor program and internships. Students in Brandeis' Evergreen House visited restaurants to "see if they wanted to be a cook," students in King's Law and Justice Institute were paired with lawyers from law firms, and students in Jackson's Humanities and Arts House visited the Whitney museum. Students at Bronx Regional reported seeing a number of movies about such subjects as AIDS and racism, and a student at Prospect Heights described doing oral presentations on projects they were doing in global studies and in biology.

Schools that used innovative instruction reported good results. Eighty percent found improved attendance and student responsiveness in class, 70 percent reported an increase in credits earned, and 50 percent saw an improvement in course grades. However, a few coordinators also noted that the teachers would like more in-depth staff development on the use of alternative approaches such as portfolios.

Alternative Instructional Options

All of the coordinators reported that the school provided a number of "alternative" instructional options, such as P.M. schools--that is, classes given after regular school hours--and independent study. In addition, 50 percent of the coordinators reported the use of shared instruction/cooperative teaching, in-house G.E.D., community service, work experience, and internships.

Of these various activities, the coordinators seemed particularly enthusiastic about P.M. schools. The coordinator from Grady, for example, reported that there were 90-minute classes in English, social studies, math, science, and shop twice a week right after school, and that the students liked these classes because they gave them more options in terms of how they managed their schooling. The coordinator at Erasmus noted that "some kids cut regular classes" in order to take a P.M. class, so that they are in fact "self-selected" and therefore "do better" in school, and the coordinator at Prospect Heights noted that the

P.M. schools' later hours made it easier for students who are parents to attend.

Others were enthusiastic about independent study because it allows the students to work at their own pace, with the coordinator at Fort Hamilton reporting that this option had become so popular that they had had to restrict it. Still other coordinators expressed their liking for work programs. For example, Brandeis had an intergenerational program for science credit in which students worked in homes for the aged, and received training in patient care, office procedures, and pharmacy. Proponents of these work programs pointed out that it helps the students connect school with the "real world." Other examples of innovative instruction included having groups of advanced students help other students within the class at Jackson and Bronx Regional.

In addition to interviewing Project Achieve coordinators, O.E.R. evaluators also spoke with the coordinator of one house at each of the sample schools in relation to a number of topics, including such innovative instructional techniques as team teaching and interdisciplinary or blocked classes, and whether the house had a core instruction team.

The Fort Hamilton, William Grady, Dewitt Clinton, and Bronx Regional house coordinators all reported that their house did <u>not</u> have such a team, and these coordinators, plus those at Prospect Heights and Brandeis, indicated that there was no team teaching in that house. Three of the other four house coordinators

provided few details on their use of team teaching, although the coordinator of the Discovery House at Erasmus said that team teaching was being done with two student interns from the New School, who were pursuing a master's degree in teaching.

However, most house coordinators indicated that there were interdisciplinary or blocked classes, most frequently involving English and social studies classes. The coordinator of the Humanities and Arts House at Jackson noted that students in English, social studies, and art classes wrote and acted small plays together, and also took trips to theatres and museums. The coordinator of the Service Occupations House (automotive, climate control, applicance service, foods) at Grady said that shop teachers worked with math and science teachers so that abstract concepts could be applied in the shop; e.g., learning mathematics through automotive measurements. The coordinator of the Honors House at Prospect Park, who said that the entire freshman honors program, including lunch, was blocked, also reported close cooperation between science and math teachers, and said that they were aiming for even more cross-curricular integration next year. Perhaps the most innovative approach was reported by the coordinator of the Discovery House at Erasmus, who said that he was trying a "negotiated curriculum arrangement," in which students in both the English and Discovery* classes would be

---

*These classes are about the students' interpersonal relationships, and involve writing every day.

given the power to investigate and research topics that they were "truly interested in."

STAFFING--OTHER THAN TEACHERS

Since program guidelines required each house to have an affiliated assistant principal, an average counselor-to-student ratio not to exceed 1 to 300, a full-time family assistant, and an affiliation with C.B.O. staff, evaluators also asked the house coordinators about their staffing levels. The results of this survey are shown in Table 2. Note that in a few cases, the ratio of guidance counselors to students was less than 1 per 300. Only one of the houses had at least one grade advisor, but most had C.B.O. staff affiliated directly with that house.

All of the house coordinators except the person at Brandeis reported that there was an assistant principal (A.P.) affiliated with the house. The A.P.'s house-related duties usually included being the instructional leader, attending meetings and case conferences, and conducting staff development. This information can be compared with the responses of the Project Achieve coordinators, 80 percent of whom reported that A.P.s were affiliated with all of the houses in the school. Most of the Achieve coordinators indicated that the A.P.s continued to carry out other duties in the school as well.

Sixty percent of the Project Achieve coordinators reported that A.P.s had difficulty making the transition to house affiliation. Some A.P.s resisted assuming the extra responsibility of supervising houses, and others were

Table 2

Number of House-Based Students and Staff in Project Achieve Sample Houses

School	Number of Sample House Students	A.P.s, Deans	Guidance Counselors	Grade Advs.	Fam. Assts.	C.B.O. Staff	Name of House
BASIS							
Fort Hamilton	400	2	1	0	1	0	Business and Performing Arts
William E. Grady	470	2	1	0	2	2	Service Occupations
BROOKLYN							
Erasmus Hall	130	3	1	0	1	1	Discovery
Prospect Hts.	23	2	1	0	0	2	Honors
BRONX							
DeWitt Clinton	350	1	1	0	1	0	Governors
Taft	350	2	1	0	1	5	Business Institute
MANHATTAN							
Brandeis	100	0	0.5	0.5	1	1	Evergreen
M.L. King, Jr.	750	1	3	3	1	3	Cultural/Business/ Law & Justice*
QUEENS							
Andrew Jackson	400	2	2	0	2	3	Humanities & Arts
ALTERNATIVE							
Bronx Regional	100	2	1	0	3	1	Family Group**

*Evaluators interviewed students from three different houses.

**There are five family groups, A to C which are then broken down into teams identified by a three-digit number. Evaluators interviewed students from several different teams.

- Houses varied considerably in terms of the ratio of staff members to students in the house.

uncomfortable with the uncertainty of their position in houses, remaining committed primarily to their department.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Evaluators also asked house coordinators about the support services provided in the house. All ten reported that counseling, social services, attendance, and extracurricular activities were provided, nine cited work and internship referrals, seven said that work training was provided, and five reported that students were provided with pregnancy and parenting instruction.

It was interesting to note who the students cited as the person they talked to first when they had "problems." Most mentioned either the guidance counselor or the house coordinator, although a few mentioned particular teachers, members of their family, or--in the case of Prospect Heights--the case manager for their C.B.O. (Goodwill Industries).

COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

All of the schools in O.E.R.'s sample had at least one C.B.O., and nine of the ten had more than one. All of these houses reported having "councils" or "round tables" at which issues common to all of the C.B.O.s could be discussed.

All of the Achieve coordinators reported that their C.B.O.s functioned well and were well-integrated into their school. In many schools, C.B.O. staff were integrated into specific houses and served only the students in that house. Counseling,

mediation, attendance tracking, and family outreach were most frequently mentioned as the services provided by C.B.O. staff.

Coordinators stated that part of the effectiveness of the C.B.O.s lay in their ability to work with students and families before and after the school day, and that they had come to rely on these support services. Many coordinators requested additional funding to expand their C.B.O.s' services to students, and none wanted a C.B.O.'s staff removed from the school.

Case Conferencing

All ten house coordinators reported the use of case conferencing in monitoring student progress, and providing services and referrals. These conferences typically involved guidance counselors, teachers, and family assistants, and most also included an A.P. and occasionally a dean. These meetings were usually weekly, and were devoted to discussing particular students' problems and how to solve them, such as increased attendance outreach, or providing tutors to students with academic problems, or making referrals to outside organizations. At Jackson, the conferences were usually limited to a discussion of three students. Some house coordinators also reported changes in their case conferencing methods from last year. The coordinator at Fort Hamilton said that case management was new at that house, and that they had just added family paraprofessionals to the program. The coordinator at Clinton said that they had redefined their case conferencing methods to use their time more effectively, and the coordinator at Taft said that the house had

instituted an open door policy for counseling that would hopefully lead to better outcomes for the program, especially in the area of attendance.

Similar accounts of case counseling procedures were provided by the Project Achieve coordinators, with the coordinator at Erasmus stating that "the bulk of the Project Achieve money is spent for case management with freshmen."

ATTENDANCE MONITORING

As Project Achieve schools have decentralized into houses, some student attendance tracking functions have shifted from attendance offices to houses. However, the schools in O.E.R.'s sample varied in the ways in which their house staff and attendance office staff divided the tasks of monitoring students and gathering attendance statistics.

In 70 percent of the houses, family assistants in the house tracked student attendance. They compiled a list of absentees each day from class lists, and gave it to the house coordinator for review. The assistants or C.B.O. staff members would contact students after one to three days of absence. For example, Erasmus Hall's students reported that they received a note or a telephone call at home after a single day's absence, and if they were absent for two days, they were expected to produce an explanatory note from a family member. One of these students noted that if she missed more than a few days, the English teacher would probably call to give her her homework. Students at Fort Hamilton noted that cards were sent home for the first

few days they were absent, and then the family assistant would make a visit, and a student at Prospect Heights said that you need to bring a "legitimate" note after an absence of three days, and that "you must get your assignments from your study partner, which everyone has."

In some schools, both attendance office and house attendance staff were involved in tracking individual students. At Prospect Heights, the attendance secretary called absent students and sent out letters, but referred those parents who responded to the call or letter to house personnel. At Brandeis, the decision to make a home visit to a student who had been absent 16 days or more could come either from attendance office staff or the student's house staff. At Bronx Regional, attendance office staff tracked absences and spoke with house advisors about student absences.

In some schools, both houses and attendance offices kept attendance information for each student. For example, at Erasmus Hall, the houses and the attendance staff both kept a 40-week attendance card for each student that included phone calls and home visits. In other schools, attendance office staff spent time each day in each house tracking attendance and sitting in on house attendance meetings.

HOUSE OFFICES

Eighty percent of the Project Achieve coordinators reported that each of their houses had its own office. However, house offices varied considerably in size, privacy, and amenities. Some, such as William Grady, had their own office complete with

telephones, tables, vending machines, a copy machine, and a computer, while others (20 percent) had only a shared space for an office. In some instances, the lack of a separate space for houses may be a result of less than wholehearted support for the house concept. In many other instances, it is the consequence of vastly overcrowded buildings designed over a hundred years ago.

Nine of the ten coordinators said that the offices were used for office and meeting space for house staff, and for counseling, although seven of these coordinators felt that the space was not as private as it should be for counseling. Eighty percent of the schools used their Project Achieve office for tutoring, and 70 percent of the schools used some of the space for displays of students' accomplishments, such as a good attendance bulletin board, and also allowed the students to use the space for socializing. Sixty percent of the coordinators felt their offices were too small for socializing and relaxing, and 30 percent reported problems with the school building, such as ongoing renovation.

Several of the students interviewed by O.E.R. commented on access to Achieve office space. "You spend free periods in the house," said one Grady student, "it's comfortable to be in." And another said, "You can come to the house when you have problems. You wouldn't know where to go in a regular school."

COMMON TIME

All schools gave staff some form of common time. Nine of the ten sample schools gave program staff a common preparation

period, and 60 percent of the schools had a common lunch period. Fifty percent of the schools had "flex" time, which is a common free period for the entire school.

Coordinators reported that most staff used common time for administrative tasks such as house meetings, department conferences, and schoolwide planning team meetings. Only 40 percent of the coordinators said that the time was used to plan instruction and develop curriculum. In addition, they reported that teachers who taught in more than one house found it difficult to attend all of their house meetings.

MANAGEMENT

House Management

All sample schools held house management meetings periodically to discuss internal house issues. Forty percent of the schools used these meetings to work out attendance tracking and monitoring issues, and 40 percent discussed instructional issues such as selecting books. Fifty percent used house management meetings to plan joint events with other houses, and 20 percent used this time to discuss staff and student conflicts.

House coordinators communicated information from their house management meetings to various other groups in their school both formally and informally. Seventy percent of the coordinators said that they reported relevant information at Project Achieve and SBM/SDM meetings, and at monthly cabinet meetings. Thirty percent communicated by informal conversations with individuals, and another 30 percent communicated formally via written memos

and letters. Eighty percent of the coordinators were satisfied that their ways of communicating to departments and other groups faciliated modifications of instructional technique and curriculum to better meet students' needs.

Eighty percent of the Project Achieve coordinators reported that they convened all of their house coordinators periodically to discuss issues common to all houses. Agenda items included clarifying roles among house staff (for example, between teachers who were also house coordinators and guidance counselors), implementing a schoolwide internship program with community-based organizations, interfacing with outside agencies when referring a student, and developing a process for transfers between houses.

Schoolwide Planning and Management

A majority of the Project Achieve coordinators reported that schoolwide planning and management was carried out by a team that represented all of the school's constituencies rather than by an administrative group such as a principal's cabinet. Ninety percent of the sample schools had a schoolwide planning team in addition to a Project Achieve team. The groups avoided duplication of effort and gaps in communication by various methods. In 70 percent of the schools, the Project Achieve team had become a subgroup of the SBM/SDM team. In these schools, and in some schools in which there were two autonomous planning teams, the teams considered separate issues, but communication was facilitated by the fact that many of the same people were members of both teams and attended both sets of meetings.

Sixty percent of the coordinators felt that their teams were too large and unwieldy, while 40 percent felt that the team size was manageable. More important, only 20 percent found their teams to be too narrow in terms of membership categories.

Despite the reported unhappiness with the size of the teams, eight of the ten Achieve coordinators interviewed by O.E.R. reported that their schoolwide planning teams made decisions easily. The two coordinators who reported difficulties said that these problems resulted from unfamiliarity with group decision-making processes, and suggested that the team could benefit from assistance with group process.

PROGRAM SUPPORT

As in previous years, the D.H.S. Office of Performance Outcomes supported and monitored Project Achieve in its 34 participating schools. The Office provided a liaison who visited each school monthly to monitor progress and to serve as a conduit to the resources available from central office staff.

In addition, the Office of Performance Outcomes provided monthly staff development days for house coordinators, and special meetings for new coordinators, where topics such as working with C.B.O.s and developing a budget were covered. Coordinators welcomed the monthly meetings because they gave staff "an opportunity to network with one another."

The Office of Performance Outcomes also convened staff from each school for an end-of-year summary, worked with schools to

design Project Achieve plans for the 1994-95 school year, and convened staff from each member school to negotiate 1994-95 contracts with C.B.O.s.

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

Most of the students interviewed by O.E.R. evaluators expressed considerable satisfaction with the house that they were in and with the house concept in general. "People are kind and helpful," a student at Fort Hamilton High School said, "it feels comfortable." Another student in this house commented, "Being in a house is good because if you are having a problem you have someone to turn to, instead of being a number in a big school," and a third student said, "It's more organized in the sense that advisors and help are not scattered throughout the school, and the house allows me to focus on my goals and plans."

Many students reported that being in a house is "fun." A student at Grady went on to explain this comment, by saying that "There are lots of things to do. Clubs. A computer to practice for R.C.T.s on. There's a place to relax, with vending machines. In a regular school, you can walk around the halls and get into trouble." A ninth grader in the Honors House at Prospect Heights commented, "It's fun. You get to meet a lot of interesting people and be in a lot of interesting groups. It helps you be organized at all times. . . In a house you are not only organized for yourself, but you help your schoolmates as well. We are like brothers and sisters." And another ninth grader at this school said, "It's fun. Challenging. They give you a chance; teachers

explain what you need to know until you understand what it is." And a student at Brandeis commented tersely, "It's not boring."

Other students in the Honors House at Prospect Heights commented on the fact that they have a lot of responsibilities. According to a 15-year-old boy at this school, "We have to keep up our grade point average and not do anything to hurt our academic record." This student also explained the differences between being in a house and not being in a house in this way: "The work is more advanced. The social behavior is more advanced as well."

The students in the Business Institute at Taft were especially conscious of what they were learning as result of being in the house. An eleventh-grader said that what she liked about being in a house was that "You learn more things about life and how to associate or relate with people," and a tenth grader said, "It is better to be in a house because you learn some skills that are going to help you in the real world. . . If you are not in a house, you learn randomly." A youngster in King's Cultural Arts House said that "It opens your mind culturally about music," and a 16-year-old at Erasmus said, "You get to learn a lot about different things--science, math, English. . . The teachers make learning fun and we can keep it in our heads."

And finally, a number of students felt that being in a house gave them a chance to be valued for being themselves. "It feels great," an 18-year-old twelfth grader in Jackson's House of Humanities and Art said. "I am very enthusiastic about being in

a house because I'm able to speak and represent various viewpoints and topics I believe in." Another twelfth grader in this house said, "Being in a house is like having your own crew of people. You get to know the people better." "I feel more wanted," another said. "There are more people taking care of you." "It's cool, " said a 17-year-old girl at Bronx Regional, "We have open discussions and I like that."

Interviewers also asked the students whether there was anything they wished they had to make school better that they didn't have now. Many students had suggestions. The most common "wish list" items were for more security guards in the school so that they would feel safer, for other students to stop "acting up" or "playing around," to be provided with more books and with more activities after school, and to have more "caring" teachers.

On the other hand, many students also felt that the school was fine as it was. "I have no complaints about my house," said a twelfth grader at Taft. "I wish all the houses were like mine." "We have everything we need. My school is perfect," asserted a student in King's Law & Justice Institute." "I would try to have all students in houses doing the same things I'm doing right now," said a student at Jackson, "because the house is fun." And an eleventh grader at Grady responded to the question by saying, "Nothing. The school is great to me. I used to be in trouble. They turned me around."

HOUSE COORDINATORS' PERCEPTIONS

And finally, interviewers asked the ten house coordinators to describe what they liked and didn't like about being house-affiliated, and what changes they would like to see made in the future. Here are some of their comments about what they liked about houses:

- We begin seeing students as more than an intellect; we see them as a whole being.
- I like the close contact with the kids, the common goal--to keep the kids that are doing well on that path, and to get those not doing well on the path.
- There is a feeling of family, a very caring environment among the students and between students and teachers.
- It gives a sense of house life and family. Students have a place to go when they have a problem.
- I get to know the students very well and they get to know me very well.
- I like working the same students for a few years. I get to know them better and they do better in school.
- I have a rapport with the students. They know somebody to complain to or who can help them.
- A sense of accomplishment. We don't feel frustrated. We are small, and this is the key--we see our kids develop and grow, we get to know them. They function better in small groups than they can function in large groups. It's like a family, a sense of community.
- It gives students someone to talk to about their lives, and to work out problems. They can have input in school activities and academics. Also, it is a link with student government.
- Development of group pride, increased levels of teacher cooperation, instructional coordination, increased opportunities for interdisciplinary studies, mutual support among students, increased school spirit, student retention, and higher academic performance.

Complaints included the following:

- Houses are too big.
- Our house is too large. We need more equipment, money, and supplies.
- I'd like more time to do the job. I'd like to focus on both under- and over-achievers.
- I like everything, although it is very time consuming.
- The increased amount of work without adequate compensation in time. . . also, we need a common office consultation time, and should set up special instructional units for extremely bright students.
- The fact that we do not have enough training for teachers because it needs a great commitment from teachers and administrators.
- Sometimes colleagues think that the house coordinator doesn't have the right to make suggestions on how to run a class.

And finally, the comments on the house as a whole:

- It's the best thing that happened. . . The house creates a comfortable environment for the kids, a home away from home. . . . It's a good team.
- This has been an extremely successful house experience. Now having done this for eight years, I have helped students create life-long friendships based on group identity.
- This is the best house in the school. I think we train our students well, even though it takes a lot of energy and a lot of dedication. We have good support from the Achieve coordinator. If we have problems, we have to use our best efforts to make the project work.
- There was a tremendous amount of support for me when I came in. I've learned a lot, but there is still a long way to go. . . If I had the same A.P. next year as I do now, I would commit to teaching in a house, but I cannot commit until that happens.
- It's very challenging to meet the needs of students with such a range of abilities and risk factors.

- We are not satisfied with the results. The program is not working as well as it could. Students need much support to succeed in high school.

- Kids don't see this as a punishment. [I find it] exciting to get up and go to work.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In its fourth year of operation, the Project Achieve program seemed to be operating quite successfully at the ten schools visited by evaluators from the Office of Educational Research. By and large, both students and staff members were very enthusiastic about the program, and were definitely in favor of having it continue at that school.

However, a number of problems--both on-going and new--were identified by the evaluators. One of the on-going problems is the large size of some of the houses. High student-staff ratios are difficult to remedy since they are one consequence of the severe budget cuts that schools have had to absorb in recent years. However, maintaining students in large houses with high student-staff ratios vitiates one of the primary goals of Project Achieve, which is to give at-risk students the opportunity for close, on-going contact with staff members and with their peers.

Another problem is the fact that a goodly number of the houses in this sample are still homogenous in nature. Some of the coordinators indicated that organizing students into houses created scheduling problems, and it also appears that there may be some instances in which keeping students with similar risk factors together serves a useful purpose. Nonetheless, keeping them in homogenous houses deprives them from the opportunity of interacting with a wide range of their peers and--if these houses have been set up on the basis of risk factors--introduces the possibility of low student morale and high staff turnover.

The continuance of these two problems after four years of financial and liaison support suggests that it may become necessary to link the level of funding provided to these schools with their degree of plan implementation. It could be argued that withdrawing funding for a school that has a high percentage of at-risk students penalizes the very students that the program was designed to benefit. On the other hand, however, it can also be argued that these students are not receiving the benefits that the program was intended to provide, so that withdrawing funding is unlikely to have much of a negative impact on them.

It was also interesting to learn that some A.P.s are still not closely affiliated with Achieve houses, because of a reluctance to take on the extra work involved, or perhaps because of uncertainty about their role in regard to these houses, or its impact on their present position within the school. This suggests that additional staff development for these administrators would be useful.

Another on-going problem is the level of affiliation of teachers with the houses, which in some cases in O.E.R.'s sample was very low. This lack of affiliation may be partially a function of scheduling difficulties, and partially a function of resistance on the part of some teachers. If this is indeed the case, then it might be useful to help the schools increase these levels of affiliation, perhaps by developing a staffing team in each school that would help work through these difficulties. However, care should be taken that the teachers assigned to these

houses are agreeable to the assignment and willing to work actively with the students in that house.

A related problem is the failure of a number of schools in O.E.R.'s sample to comply with the new requirement that core instructional teams be set up, particularly for ninth and tenth grade students. The reasons for this deficit were not clear, and should be closely investigated.

Despite the lack of core instructional teams in some schools and some houses, all of the schools provided instances of the use of innovative instructional methods, such as interdisciplinary courses and collaborative teaching, the use of portfolios, and the provision of alternative educational opportunities, such as P.M. school, independent study, and various kinds of work study and internship programs. This type of innovative instruction should be supported and expanded as much as possible, with staff development in the use of these techniques, and adequate common time for planning, provided as necessary.

Attendance procedures seemed to be extensive and thorough, although in some instances there seemed to be some overlapping of the activities being carried out within the house and those carried out by the school's attendance office. Such overlapping could result in the duplication of efforts or--at the other extreme--overlooking some students. It would be useful to explore ways in which attendance and house staff could better coordinate the tasks of monitoring and tracking attendance.

Despite some complaints about the size of the Achieve and/or school-based management teams, these teams seemed to be functioning quite well. In those cases where the teams seem to be having problems with group process, staff development should be provided.

And finally, there were some complaints about the physical conditions at the school itself, including limited space for the Achieve office. Where possible, and understanding the severe space constraints existing in many overcrowded schools, Achieve schools should try to provide adequate space for the Achieve office.

Based on these findings, O.E.R. recommends that program administrators:

- mandate that schools implement Project Achieve's guidelines with respect to house size and student-staff ratios in houses, and link the level of funding provided to their success in implementing these program aspects, understanding that this recommendation may be difficult to implement given the severity of the budget cuts that schools have had to absorb;
- help schools develop student selection criteria for houses that does not result in homogenous groupings;
- help program coordinators improve the ways in which A.P.s and teachers make the transition to house affiliation;
- provide in-depth, expert staff development in the use of alternative teaching tools such as portfolios;
- explore ways schools could earmark teachers' common time for developing innovative instruction and curriculum;
- explore ways in which attendance office staff and house attendance staff can interface smoothly to track absentees, and
- attempt to provide more adequate space for the Achieve office in participating schools.

APPENDIX

Project Achieve Participating High Schools 1993-94

ALTERNATIVE

Bronx Regional

BASIS

Automotive
Boys and Girls
Curtis
Eastern District
Fort Hamilton
John Jay
Sarah J. Hale
William E. Grady

BROOKLYN

Bushwick
Erasmus Hall
George W. Wingate
Prospect Heights
Thomas Jefferson

BRONX

Adlai Stevenson
DeWitt Clinton
Evander Childs
Jane Addams
James Monroe
Morris
South Bronx
Theodore Roosevelt
Walton
William H. Taft

MANHATTAN

George Washington
Julia Richman
Louis D. Brandeis
Martin L. King, Jr.
Park West
Seward Park
Washington Irving

QUEENS

Andrew Jackson
Far Rockaway
Franklin K. Lane